| **From Subjects to Citizens**  **A Revolution of Words: The 250th Birthday of the Declaration of Independence and Its Impact on the Nation** |
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| **Colonial Americans: The Birth of the Declaration in 1776** |

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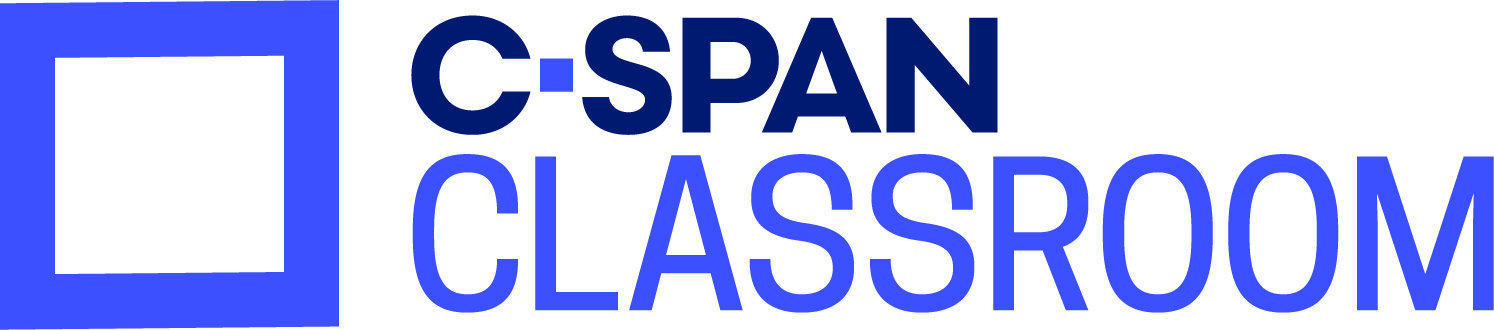
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## **LESSON OVERVIEW**

| **DESCRIPTION** |
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| In this lesson, students will examine the Declaration of Independence at its birth in 1776. The focus will be on the promises outlined in the Declaration and their connection to colonial Americans during the American Revolution. |
| **ESSENTIAL QUESTION** |
| How did the promises of the Declaration of Independence serve as an inspiration to Colonial Americans at its creation? |
| **KEY PROMISES** |
| * Equality * Unalienable Rights * Consent of the Governed * Right to Revolution |
| **MATERIALS** |
| * Hamilton “You’ll Be Back” Lyrics * Hamilton “You’ll Be Back” Song (external link) * Primary Source Digital Unwrapping Slides * National Archives Written Document Analysis Worksheet * C-SPAN “Ideals of the Declaration of Independence” Video & Questions (external link) * Declaration’s Impact on Colonial Americans Graphic Organizer * Jigsaw Primary Sources   + Abigail Adams to John Adams Letter; John Hancock to George Washington Letter; Pulling Down King George III Statue Painting; Continental Congress Military Commission for Marquis de Lafayette |

## **TEACHER CONTENT BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

*[Not intended for student use]*

**1. Key Promises in the Declaration of Independence**

1. **Equality**

The Declaration of Independence states that “all men are created equal”. This concept of equality focuses on equality as opportunity, where “all men” are created equal, although being created equal does not guarantee equal experiences. Enlightenment philosophers supported the concept of [individualism](https://centerforindividualism.org/individualism-founding-fathers-part-1-liberty-limited-government/). Individualism suggests that each person possesses an inherent worth that supports freedom, self-reliance, and individual skills, talents, and interests. Equal opportunity in the context of individualism means that being born equal does not lead to equal results or equal outcomes.

1. **Unalienable Rights**

According to the Declaration, unalienable rights (“natural rights”) are those rights with which people are born (given “by their Creator”). They include the unalienable rights of “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness”. These rights cannot be taken away by the government, and the government is also obligated to protect unalienable rights. These rights are associated with 17th to early 19th century European Enlightenment philosophers who supported unalienable rights as the means to challenge traditional authority that existed under monarchies.

1. **Consent of the Governed**

Consent of the governed includes that “governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed,” as written in the Declaration. This promise focuses on self-government. The people rule themselves through governments that they establish. Because the people establish those governments and are not ruled by a government imposed on them (such as a monarchy), the people give their consent to how they are governed. Thus, self-rule is experienced when the people establish their own government to which the people give their consent.

1. **Right to Revolution**

The right to revolution recognizes that there may be times when the government abuses its power. The Founders wrote, “[T]hat whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government...” This phrase suggests that when the people have determined that the government is not protecting their unalienable rights, they may change (“alter”) or replace (“abolish”) their government. The Declaration of Independence justified the colonists’ decision to separate from the British king. Since then, Americans have exercised their “right to revolution” by altering the government when the government has failed to live up to its promises through elections, interest groups, social movements, and political parties. Some of these changes have included broadening political power (who has it, what form it takes), defining citizenship, how the people experience self-government, and protecting individual rights.

**2. Reasons for Drafting the Declaration of Independence**

The colonists’ decision to draft the Declaration of Independence followed several years of conflict between the British crown and the colonists. Historians argue that this relationship started to deteriorate in 1763 following the end of the Seven Years' War. The Seven Years' War resulted in significant debt for the British government. As a way to emerge from this debt, the British Parliament passed several laws that taxed the colonists, including the Stamp Act (1765) and the Townshend Acts (1767). In 1774, the Parliament passed the Coercive Acts as a way to punish the colonists living in Massachusetts for the Boston Tea Party. The Coercive Acts compelled the First Continental Congress to meet in Philadelphia to agree on a response, which included a boycott of British goods and petitioning the king for a repeal of these acts. King George III did not respond to the colonists’ requests for relief on the principle that the colonists did not have the right to make such requests. The colonists generated a second petition in 1775, which was rejected by the king, and Common Sense was published in early 1776.

Between 1763 and 1776, the relationship between the colonists and the king deteriorated. The deterioration of this relationship was tied to taxes enacted by the British Parliament and the king’s refusal to redress the colonists’ grievances.

**3. Declaration of Independence Timeline**

**In March 1765,** British Parliament required colonial authorities to provide food, drink, quarters, fuel, and transportation to British forces stationed in their towns or villages.

**In May 1775,** The Second Continental Congress convenes in Philadelphia. A "petition for redress of grievances," sent to King George III of England by the First Continental Congress in 1774, remains unanswered.

**June-July 1775**, Congress establishes the Continental Army, a first national monetary currency, and a post office to serve the "United Colonies."

**In August 1775,** King George declares his American subjects to be "engaged in open and avowed rebellion" against the Crown. The British Parliament passed the American Prohibitory Act, declaring all American sea-going vessels and their cargo the property of England.

**In January 1776,** Colonists by the thousands buy copies of Thomas Paine's "Common Sense," stating the cause of American independence.

**In March 1776,** Congress passes the Privateering Resolution, allowing colonists to arm vessels in order to "cruize [sic] on the enemies of these United Colonies."

**On April 6, 1776**, American seaports were opened to trade and cargo from other nations for the first time.

**In May 1776**, Germany, through a treaty negotiated with King George, agrees to hire mercenary soldiers to help put down any potential uprising by American colonists.

**On May 10, 1776,** Congress passes the "Resolution for the Formation of Local Governments," allowing colonists to establish their own local governments. Eight colonies agreed to support American independence.

**On May 15, 1776,** The Virginia Convention passes a resolution that "the delegates appointed to represent this colony in General Congress be instructed to propose to that respectable body to declare the United Colonies free and independent states."

**On June 7, 1776,** Richard Henry Lee, Virginia's delegate to the Continental Congress, presents the Lee Resolution reading in part: "Resolved: That these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States, that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain is, and ought to be, totally dissolved."

**On June 11, 1776**, Congress postpones consideration of the Lee Resolution and appoints the "Committee of Five" to draft a final statement declaring the case for America's independence. The Committee of Five is composed of: John Adams of Massachusetts, Roger Sherman of Connecticut, Benjamin Franklin of Pennsylvania, Robert R. Livingston of New York, and Thomas Jefferson of Virginia.

**On July 2, 1776**, By the votes of 12 of the 13 colonies, with New York not voting, Congress adopts the Lee Resolution and begins consideration of the Declaration of Independence, written by the Committee of Five.

**On July 4, 1776**, Late in the afternoon, church bells ring out over Philadelphia, heralding the final adoption of the Declaration of Independence.

**On August 2, 1776**, The delegates of the Continental Congress sign the clearly printed or "engrossed" version of the Declaration.

Source:

[Continental Congress and Constitutional Convention Timeline](https://www.loc.gov/collections/continental-congress-and-constitutional-convention-from-1774-to-1789/articles-and-essays/timeline/1775/), Library of Congress

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## **ACTIVITY SEQUENCE**

| **HOOK** | 1. Pass out the [You'll Be Back Lyrics](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1OKq7Hgw5poK_ZGozLShtLbzjfFWH-L4Bj7GgaEobQY0/edit?usp=sharing) from the musical Hamilton. 2. As a whole class, listen to [You’ll Be Back](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ukfNXFgUEiU) and have students mark any lines or phrases that stand out to them. 3. Place students into pairs or small groups. 4. Instruct pairs/groups to reread the song and summarize each section into one or two sentences. 5. Underneath the lyrics, instruct students to summarize King George's overall arguments and reasoning as to why the colonists need him and shouldn’t ‘break up’ with him. 6. Bring the whole class back together and have students share responses.   **Teacher Note:** Use this activity as an opportunity to review and fill any content gaps related to the deterioration of the relationship between the British and the colonists, events leading up to the Revolution, and reasons for writing the Declaration of Independence. |
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| **FEATURED PRIMARY SOURCE UNWRAPPING** | 1. Explain to students that it is time to ‘unwrap’ this month’s primary source document.   **Teacher Note:** As the theme of these lesson plans is America’s birthday, each month, you and your students will digitally unwrap a new primary source. This is an opportunity to drum up excitement as we lead up to the 250th celebration.   1. Use the [Primary Source Digital Unwrapping Slides](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1Abc2ecRNxltd2kW7M5R0dp8mmSP4r7n7N1RXOjSUIvg/edit?usp=sharing) and reveal the primary source inside. 2. Examine the document together and ask students if anyone can identify it.   **Teacher Note:** This month’s primary source document is the Declaration of Independence. Use the link provided in the Speaker Notes of the slide to go directly to the source on the National Archives website, where you can find examination tools like a magnifier and a typed transcription.   1. Have students analyze The Declaration of Independence using the [National Archives Written Document Analysis Worksheet](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1HgX04QNtV_I_goyAJi5SOIWCrr8WFh1I/view?usp=sharing). 2. Explain to students that one of the most lasting impacts of the Declaration of Independence is the promises outlined in the Preamble. Ask students: Can anyone identify any of those promises? (example: life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness, self-government, etc.) |
| **LESSON ACTIVITY** | 1. Inform students that they are going to view [an interview](https://www.c-span.org/classroom/document/?23286) with Supreme Court Associate Justice Neil Gorsuch from C-SPAN. In the interview, he discusses three ideals of the Declaration of Independence. While they watch, have students answer pre-selected questions.   **Teacher Note:** There are eight potential questions underneath the video. Choose 2-3 to have students answer.   1. Let students know that now that they have a firm understanding of the promises of the Declaration, they will participate in one final activity to examine the Declaration’s impact on Colonial Americans at the time of its birth. 2. Place students in groups of four. Provide every student with a copy of the [Declaration’s Impact on Colonial Americans Graphic Organizer](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1e8ePWUIlfe3G1VwKF75P3IAKUnMrRRkwJUK1omJ05Y0/edit?usp=sharing). 3. Provide each group with one of the following primary sources:    1. [Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, March 31, 1776](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1tDVXJDYq6asH9VK-J04ApzAzBFf69-MZ52cTs0l8Wrc/edit?usp=sharing)    2. [Letter from John Hancock to George Washington, July 9, 1776](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1sfD7qGq67v89q1g-RVQ1dcP8LzpKRLx7IaRJBjURJBc/edit?usp=sharing)    3. [Pulling Down the Statue of George III at Bowling Green, N.Y., July 9, 1776](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1p5LK4mMvR_R_tMAlCZt_s4ToVwryW88mwQ5UDBR_KD0/edit?usp=sharing)    4. [Continental Congress Military Commission for Marquis de Lafayette, July 31, 1777](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1RhA5gesRB_miaAhKVv8oKUZyIsWrTWjOx-eV5awUUPo/edit?usp=sharing)   **Teacher Note:** You can have multiple groups examine the same source if you have more than four groups of four.   1. In their groups, have students read through and analyze their primary source. After an initial analysis, the group should work together to complete their corresponding row in the graphic organizer. 2. Once all groups have completed this initial task, have students form new groups of four, ensuring each group contains a student who examined a different primary source. 3. Using a jigsaw method, have each student share the information they learned about their primary source and the impact it demonstrated with their new groups. While each student shares, the other students should continue to fill in the appropriate rows on their graphic organizer. 4. When all groups have finished, bring the class back together. Review the last column on the graphic organizer as a whole class and allow students to adjust their answers as needed. |
| **CONCLUSION** | 1. Have students write a short journal entry from the perspective of a Colonial American who has just learned about and read the Declaration of Independence for the first time. How are they feeling? Which promise of the Declaration excites them the most and why? |

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## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND SAMPLE ANSWERS**

| **SAMPLE ANSWERS** |
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| * [Hamilton’s “You’ll Be Back” Lyrics Activity](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ZngHUBkWleknc4kTy-K-Px6NghdS47PHIWJEZc0NuHE/edit?usp=sharing) * [Declaration of Independence Written Document Analysis Worksheet](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1URHlkaSkru1Uk4GUbXlLpZF-IwPJd8B7/view?usp=drive_link) * [“Ideals of the Declaration of Independence” Video Questions](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1gKnRInn8WFB8VooWoxSeB6g0mN-ui72k7BubzY09wBY/edit?usp=sharing) * [Declaration’s Impact on Colonial Americans Graphic Organizer](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1c1iPcNGc-hOaR9LfItUwHWTRSY9hSqxe84za2dk3lgI/edit?usp=sharing) * [Written Response Rubric](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1qLrVETcjtcF-NcWqBWwNKLVyZtOH2fCWIUzIn7CaNAw/edit?usp=drive_link) |

| **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES** |
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| [C-SPAN Classroom Educator Resources](https://www.c-span.org/classroom/)  [Lou Frey Institute Educator Resources](http://floridacitizen.org)  [National Archives Document Analysis Educator Resources](https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets) |